



FRIENDS OF REPTON PARISH CHURCH

Charity No. 1162837

NEWSLETTER NO 8
Winter 2024/25



<https://www.friendsofreptonparishchurch.co.uk>
email: frpc.873ad@gmail.com

Welcome to the Winter 2024/25 Newsletter

In this issue you will find

- Trustee news
- Forthcoming events
- About FRPC and how to become a Friend.
- Review of annual lecture
- Records from the Repton Dig
- From the Archives

Trustee News

The Trustees are pleased to announce the appointment of Mrs Anna Parish, Deputy Head (Pastoral) at Repton School to join our team of Trustees.

ANNUAL LECTURE 2025

**Saturday 25th October
2 pm at St Wystan's
Church, Repton**

**The Very Revd Dr David
Hoyle, Dean of
Westminster**

Further information to follow

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Invite you to an evening with
THE BEATLES
SATURDAY 26TH APRIL
ST. WYSTAN'S CHURCH
7.30 pm

A large cast of performers and our very own Beatles historian, John Plowright, will bring their music to life in an evening of images, words and song from The Beatles' catalogue for everyone to enjoy.

Tickets -

ADULTS £20 discounts for children (including interval drink)

From Andy: 07977 440992 or frpc.873ad@gmail.com

Ticket Tailor: use QR code or buytickets.at/frpc/1494436

and The Maple Tree Cafe



DAY TRIP TO TEWKESBURY ABBEY AND DEERHURST PRIORY SATURDAY 17TH MAY 2025, LEAVING REPTON AT 8 AM, RETURNING 6.30 PM

TICKETS £40 include coach travel, coffee on arrival and guided tours.

Tewkesbury Abbey is a former Benedictine monastery and is now a parish church. It is one of the finest Norman buildings in England. Its massive crossing tower is noted in Pevsner's Buildings of England to be "probably the largest and finest Romanesque example in England".

The priory church of St Mary's Deerhurst is one of the finest and most complete buildings in England to survive from before the Norman Conquest. Its architectural history is complex and is still much debated by architectural historians, but a substantial part of the building is now considered to belong to the first half of the 9th century, It contains magnificent Anglo Saxon sculptures.

For ticket inquiries please email frpc.873ad@gmail.com

ANNUAL LECTURE 50 years of early Medieval archaeology at Repton - Professor Mark Horton

On November 2nd, Professor Mark Horton delivered the annual lecture to an absolutely packed church. The title was 50 Years of Early Medieval Archaeology at Repton. Covering both the history revealed by the dig and aspects of the dig itself, he used many of the photographs he took at the time. This was quite a privilege because it was the first time any of us had seen them.

As a schoolboy Mark was already actively digging every summer holidays, so when he heard that Prof. Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle were going to provide archaeological support to Dr Harold Taylor's investigations on the architectural history of St Wystan's in 1974 he volunteered. Still a student, he started to work on the annual digs and took part for many seasons. Among other things, Mark helped to supervise the excavations in the Vicarage garden and the chancel mound.

There was a spectacular photograph of Mark at the bottom of a massive ditch with a rope around his waist and leading to the top. It was not to pull him out in the event of a collapse, but so they could follow it down to find him. As, he said, there was a different approach to health and safety.

Mark concisely covered 50 years of archaeology from the Anglo Saxon graves in the early

trenches around the crypt to finding a very early cemetery in 2023 - via the Viking overwintering. In the process he introduced a number of newer ideas – including the possibility that the monastic building reused by the Vikings may have been a shrine rather than a chapel or mausoleum. This is based on a piece of stone that is very similar to one found in Lichfield from the roof of the shrine to St Chad.

It was a delight that Prof Martin Biddle was able to be there and the lecture was very much appreciated by the audience - many of whom had, over the years, taken part in the digging or helped in various ways such as washing finds (especially bones), examining teeth, maintaining records or, like many from the village, attending the annual in-situ end of dig talks.

The lecture was followed by refreshments and tours of the Chancel and the Mediaeval Priory site.



Professor Mark Horton and
Professor Martin Biddle

Andy Austen



ABOUT FRIENDS OF REPTON PARISH CHURCH

We are a registered charity set up to help conserve, repair and improve the beautiful and ancient church of St Wystan together with its churchyard for the benefit of all. The trustees are a mix of people committed to supporting the maintenance of the church building though not necessarily part of the worshipping community. By raising funds for specific projects agreed by the church we hope to enhance and maintain the building in good condition for future generations to enjoy.

Could you help us in our task?

If you are not already subscribed as a Friend, you are warmly invited to become a Friend of Repton Parish Church. By doing so you would

- help us in the important work of maintaining and developing this church for everyone to enjoy
- support specific projects of repair or improvement
- help preserve Repton's heritage
- receive invitations to occasional events such as an annual lecture
- receive regular updates on our progress

If you would like to join us please join online through the Charities Aid Foundation using the QR code or <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/14052> and let us know at frpc.873ad@gmail.com. That website also allows you to add Gift Aid to your donation.

RECORDS FROM THE REPTON DIG

Although, over the years, there have been many archaeological digs in Repton, the phrase Repton Dig always relates to the 12 or more seasons of digs in Repton in the 1970s and 80s led by Professor Martin Biddle and his wife Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle. Almost all the finds are in Derby Museum and members of the history group volunteered a few years pre-Covid to complete the listing of the small finds.

Late in 2022, there was a great excitement amongst those of us with a keen interest in Repton's early history. The message had come through from Spencer and Rachel at Derby Museum to say that 54 document crates had arrived from Oxford University bearing the Repton contents of Professor Biddle's office. The museum team unpacked the boxes and relocated them onto bookshelves in the old Library. They contained over 700 folders of documents plus the trench notebooks, layer records, the concordance, year books, card indexes, slides, and over 500 A0 drawings of sections and plans ... and more. This material was supplemented shortly after by documents and artefacts held by Dr Cat Jarman and it means that not only does the museum hold the artefacts from the dig, but also the supporting documentation (but not the bones!).

It was suggested that the

Repton history group might be able to make a listing of what is there and five group members set about working our way through everything and listing the contents. We were joined by two relative youngsters who were planning careers in librarianship/archiving and who proved a great help. As well as core dig material, and subsequent analysis, there is much background research into related topics. There is so much of great interest there which will be available to read in due course.

The dig had been making use of emerging digital technologies and that posed a challenge to us as some data was stored on twenty-one 5.25" floppy discs and even more of the later 3.5" discs. The 5.25" floppy discs were a challenge but we took them to the new (and excellent) Derby Computer Museum in the Irongate and they were able to copy the files for us. Again with a bit of work we accessed most of them but their contents have still to be listed.

We found portable disk drives that would open the 3.5" discs although the files were not initially readable. There are 80 discs, each containing about 20 files. Each file has to have a new file extension added after which we can usually open it. Then the contents have to be assessed, summarised and recorded. This is a big job and we copied the discs and shared them out and are working on them as time permits. A copy of dBase may

have to be tracked down for some files, but so far we have found much of Dr Stoddart's work on the bones and it makes fascinating reading even to someone that doesn't know a fibula from a tibia. There are also indexes to photographs and hundreds of slides as well as more general information - for example a paper on frogs and toads (stratified bones were found during the dig).

It is hoped that in due course, all the material might be made more widely accessible and possibly pulled together to provide a comprehensive story. Martin and Birthe have already written a number of papers on the Viking period and on the stone work, but there may be more to tell on the earlier Anglo Saxon times, and the opportunity to publish the work of Dr Stoddart and an interpretation of the graves and the artefacts and a story of Repton in the early medieval period.

A generous donation has been made to enable this work to be done and is held in trust by the Derbyshire Archaeological Society and trustees have been appointed to manage the project which includes the County Archaeologist, Derby Museums representatives, a member of the Archaeological Society and Repton Village History group.

Andy Austen

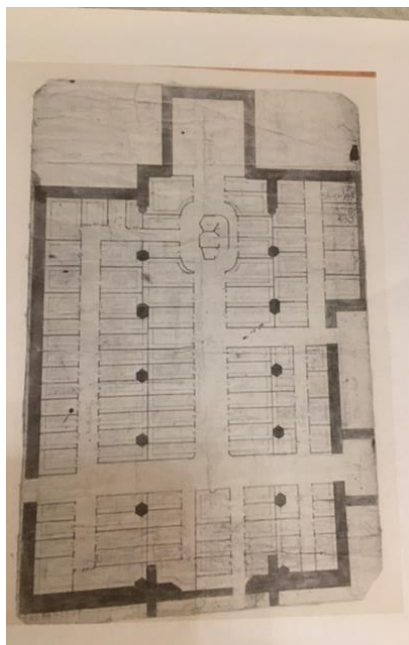
FROM THE ARCHIVES

They did things differently in 1792

These days if major changes to an historic church building such as St Wystan's are proposed, a long list of permissions and procedures have to be worked through before plans can be put in to effect. 230 years or so ago things were very different. If influential people in the local community felt that change was needed and the money could be found then things happened very quickly.

We see this in changes to the interior of St Wystan's in 1792. The alterations proposed included among other things new pews. The faculty seeking permission for the work made the case that *"the seats pews and sitting places in the parish church of Repton aforesaid are very old, irregular, and un-uniform and that the minister churchwardens parishioners and inhabitants of the said parish duly assembled in vestry have unanimously resolved and agreed that the same should be taken down and that new seats pews and seating places should be erected in a uniform manner by which much room would be gained..."* ⁽¹⁾ In other words the local community in the form of the parish vestry wanted to tidy up the church and make it look a bit more up to date. It was also thought necessary to increase the seating capacity the generally held view was that that a parish church should be able to seat most of the adult inhabitants.

Other work was done: the floor of the nave was raised to the level of the chancel so that there was level floor all the way through from the west end to the sanctuary at the east end.



1 New pews 1792
(DRO D638/A/PI/941)

The stated reason for this was concern about damp which we can understand. It did however spoil the proportions of the building. Bagshaw Stevens, the School headmaster talks about this in his diary and the way it had been decided in the parish vestry meeting *"the ideas of the carpenter S Smith prevailed over the plan of the original architect, ideas drawn from the snugness of an Alehouse Smoking Room not at all analogous to the Gothic Grandeur of an ancient venerable church."*⁽²⁾ In other words this upstart village tradesman stirred up the locals to decide what should be done to the inside of their parish church. Significantly it was the carpenter Seth Smith just referred to who did the work for £500 (about £60,000 now). In addition many ancient monuments were removed so the overall outcome was that the medieval church interior was transformed into something essentially utilitarian that lasted less than 100 years as the pews and other furnishings were changed again in the 1885-6 restoration that gave the church interior the appearance it has today. All that has survived of the

medieval woodwork are some finely carved pew ends incorporated in to panelling under the tower at the west end.



2 Panelling incorporating pew ends (R Finch)

References

1. Derbyshire Record Office - DRO D638/A/PI/66
2. The journal of the Rev William Bagshaw Stevens ed G Galbraith 1965 p29

Richard Finch

Donation for Repairs to chancel stonework

The quinquennial inspection of St Wystan's in 2023 identified the need for repairing areas of the Anglo Saxon chancel stonework where the mortar had eroded. The work specified by the church architect, Mark Parsons, was carried out by Midland Masonry in October 2024 at a cost of £10,327 + VAT and fees. FRPC was pleased to be able to donate £5,000 towards this cost which was gratefully received by Repton Parochial Church Council.

Virginia Davis